

TO: Associate Professor Marian Tulloch

FROM: Jennifer Munday
Richard Taffe

DATE: February 28th, 2006

This is our Finalisation Report for the project *Learning to Learn: An investigation into student learning and the development of professional practice in undergraduate vocational education*.

The research project was very successful. It has led to further investigation into the utility of authentic tasks as assessment items in other subjects offered in the School. As the literature on authentic tasks and performance based assessment shows, this approach to designing learning tasks for our students can have important implications for the development of undergraduates' professional skills and practice. The research to this point confirms the findings of others in this regard and points to the development of future practices in learning and teaching that should improve student professional practice and their own articulation of that practice.

A number of findings emerged from our analysis of the data from the research conducted for this Scholarship Grant. The following points provide a summary of the findings in phase one and two of the research:

- Most students had a personal preference for what they termed 'hands on', 'visual', and 'demonstration' styles of teaching;
- Some students expressed difficulty in learning from approaches that relied on the verbal, for example, books, lectures, internet, and so on.
- Most thought verbal approaches were more taxing and less motivating, even though not all disliked them;
- Participants who believed they learned less from written/verbal approaches tended to demonstrate poorer literacy/verbal skills;
- Some participants felt very comfortable with written and verbal tasks providing certain supports were available to assist them in learning;
- In contrast to their own preferred learning styles, most students said they would use verbal strategies in their work with young children – the very strategies they declared were least effective for learning. For instance, students described activities – such as collage with environmental materials – but said that they would principally introduce and explain this activity using verbal, lecture style methods.
- All students agreed on the need to structure planned learning experiences so the learner was prepared for the content or subject matter of the learning experience, by introducing children to examples, production techniques, terminology, or children's own prior experiences (i.e., advance organisers).
- The topic of learning needed to be personally interesting and presented in a way that encouraged discussion and personal engagement. Students, for example, said that successful learning strategies included ensuring that the content was relevant and connected to what the student knows;

- When planning lessons all the student teachers focussed their lessons on children's practical exploration of materials in relation to the children's own interests and understanding of the Museum exhibition content.

What does that mean for us as University educators?

- Increased need for authentic tasks
- More opportunities for students to explore the processes of learning, and to explore their own beliefs about teaching and learning
- Need to revise current approaches to teacher education/University vocational education built on traditional campus-based teaching models
- There is a case for developing stronger links with industry and other community resources which may serve as sites for professional learning for students. For example, the Museum/Art Gallery project which was the authentic task in our research offered students an opportunity to demonstrate their skills and understandings relevant to their practitioner skills in teaching, learning and the interpretation of artistic and cultural heritage artefacts.
- It's important to ensure that moves towards authentic learning tasks and community based projects don't simply become de facto apprenticeships, and that the role of the University program is a key factor in helping students to interpret their experiences in industry and community based projects.

We were able to disseminate the results and research from the project through refereed journal articles and conference presentations:

2006:

- *Learning about learning through teaching*, refereed journal article accepted for publication in the *International Journal of Learning*, Vol. 12 (2005 edition).

2005:

- Learning about learning through teaching, paper presented at the *ATEA National Conference*, Gold Coast, July 6-9.
- *Munday, J. (2005). Taking education on a field trip: An authentic task that provides authentic learning. Refereed paper presented at the *ATEA National Conference*, Gold Coast, July 6-9.

2004:

- Munday, J & Taffe, R. (2004). *An investigation into the way student teachers transfer their own learning strategies to help children learn*. Paper presented at the AARE Annual Conference Melbourne, 30 November – 2 December.
- * Munday, J. & Taffe, R. (2004). Learning to learn: Teacher education students' reflections on being a learner and teaching learners. *ATEA annual conference*, 5-8 July, Bathurst, NSW
- * Munday, J. & Taffe, R. (2004). An investigation into the way student teachers transfer their own learning strategies to help children learn. *International Journal of Learning*, 11, 999-1005.

Budget

The entire fund allocated to this project was expended through relieving both academics from a portion of their teaching allocation in Spring Session 2005.

Final Comment

We were very grateful for the opportunity to explore this topic through the Scholarship in Teaching fund, and the results have affected our teaching. The research has uncovered some other thoughts and questions that the researchers are considering for future collaborative projects. For example, we intend to further explore authentic learning tasks in other subject areas. Also the authentic tasks could be used as an assessment strategy that could effectively and validly assess student learning and competency across a range of subjects in courses.

During the course of this work we also had an opportunity to consider the origin of student beliefs about professional identity. This has prompted us to reflect further on the sources that students use in developing a professional sense of self. It urges us to plan to develop new methods of exploring and critiquing the different models of professional identity that students hold to, which can significantly affect their developing practice.



Dr Richard Taffe



Jennifer Munday